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Briton to Meet With Beirut Captors of Americans

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BEIRUT, Lebanon, Nov. 16 — Terry Waite, a special representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury, said today that he had made arrangements to talk directly with the captors of four Americans held in Lebanon.

The British mediator said in a statement distributed here to news organizations that he had decided to take the step after he became "reasonably certain" that he "was dealing with the right people."

Reporters and television crews had gathered in the lobby of the Commodore Hotel in West Beirut expecting

Mr. Waite to make an announcement in person. Instead, they were given a brief statement in English that Mr. Waite issued through a Western news agency.

It was at the hotel, a center for the international press in Lebanon, that Mr. Waite made an impromptu appearance on Thursday to announce that he had talked with those who say they have kidnapped the Americans in the Moslem western part of this Lebanese capital in the last two years.

A group calling itself Islamic Holy War has said it seized the hostages. The leaders and members of the shadowy group are not known. They are believed to be Shiite Moslem radicals linked to Iran and its leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Mr. Waite, who has gained the release of British captives in Iran and Libya, arrived here Wednesday after the head of the Anglican Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, received a letter from four American hostages.

The hostages are Terry A. Anderson, the chief Middle East correspondent for The Associated Press; the Rev. Lawrence M. Jenco, a Roman Catholic priest; David P. Jacobsen, the director of the American University Hospital, and Thomas M. Sutherland, American University's dean of agriculture.

There are two other Americans miss-

ing in Beirut. The Holy War group said last month that it had "executed" one, William Buckley, a political officer at the United States Embassy, although his body has not been found. The fate of the sixth, Peter Kilburn, a head librarian at the American University, remains unknown.

In his statement today, Mr. Waite said he had agreed to meet with the captors after receiving answers to questions that could be given only by one of the hostages. He did not elaborate.

"Since I arrived in Beirut on Wednesday," Mr. Waite said in the statement, "I have been in frequent contact with the group holding the four American hostages. I received an offer to meet the group but declined until I could be reasonably certain that I was dealing with the right people."

"I put certain questions to my contact which could only be answered by one of the hostages," he said. "When the correct answer was received, I determined that the risk associated with a face-to-face meeting could be taken and that meeting will take place at some point."

He did not say when or where the meeting would take place. His statement was intended to fulfill a promise that he will keep the press and television informed about his progress in return for his privacy.

He had said earlier that he would also seek to meet with the hostages.

His statement made it clear today that safety is an overriding consideration. "I wish to stress that I am concerned as much for the safety of the captors as their hostages and myself," he said. "I thank members of the press

and other members of the media for giving me the privacy I need in order to carry out my mission."

Brig. Gen. Ghazi Kanaan of the Syrian Army has been in touch with fundamentalist groups in West Beirut, and the local press has linked his meetings to what was described as Syrian efforts to free all Western hostages. Moslem fundamentalists are also holding four Frenchmen and a Briton, all also abducted in West Beirut.

General Kanaan is chief intelligence officer for the 20,000 Syrian troops in Lebanon. He has been credited with securing the release last month of three Soviet Embassy officials.

The Russians had been held for a month by men who said they belonged to the previously unknown Islamic Liberation Organization.